



PROJECT MUSE®

On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction: Preliminary Studies
in the Theory of Communicative Action (review)

Jason Baird Jackson

Language, Volume 78, Number 2, June 2002, p. 384 (Review)

Published by Linguistic Society of America

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2002.0094>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/19355>

explained by means of relevance theory. Unacceptability is equated here with the speaker's failure to achieve optimal relevance.

The author concludes that relevance theory seems to be the most satisfactory model for dealing with bridging reference assignment as far as the resolution of bridging and its acceptability are concerned (Ch. 6, 'Conclusions', 197–209). The study is supported by three questionnaire surveys which are detailed in the appendix of the book (211–29). This book reads well and succeeds in presenting the topic in a clear, orderly manner. [CARLOS INCHAURRALDE, *University of Zaragoza*.]

On the pragmatics of social interaction:

Preliminary studies in the theory of communicative action. By JÜRGEN HABERMAS. Translated by BARBARA FULTNER. (Studies in contemporary German social thought.) Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001. Pp. xxiv, 192.

This is an English translation of Jürgen Habermas's 1984 work *Vorstudien und Ergänzungen zur Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp). The original German language text was, in turn, based on The Christian Gauss Lectures delivered at Princeton University in 1971. Spanning four decades, it is thus both a theoretical study and a historical document. Despite the passage of time, H's role as the leading figure in German social thought justifies publication of this translation on both grounds.

Five lectures progressively introduce H's social theory as it applies to what he characterizes as 'communicative action' (symbolically mediated interaction) and 'universal pragmatics' (by which he means a generalizing, philosophically oriented discipline midway between 'linguistics on one hand and empirical pragmatics on the other', 72). Among the key influences shaping H's views are George Herbert Mead's approach to social interaction as a dynamic system of reciprocal expectations. Also crucial are the later works of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Edmund Husserl, although H modifies and critiques their thought in original ways.

Because it originated in a series of lectures, the work retains value as a short and focused introduction to H's views of language and society. Linguists and anthropologists unfamiliar with his writings will find many rewarding instances where his thought intersects with issues of contemporary concern in their fields. Acknowledging this benefit, they will also be frustrated at these points for H's lack of engagement with their own literatures, even as they stood in 1971. While linguistic anthropologists will likely applaud his revitalization of Mead's often neglected work,

they will also see issues, such as H's discussions of implicit knowledge of linguistic and cultural rules where, for instance, Franz Boas's work on metal-lingual awareness would have provided useful grounding. Similarly, throughout his work H writes in a philosophical idiom about issues that were and are central to the sociology of Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu and the semiotic and linguistic theories of Roman Jakobson, Mikhail Bakhtin, and V. N. Voloshinov. Scholars interested in the enduring issues raised by these thinkers will find that H's work represents a provocative and interesting exploration of them but one conducted on a parallel rather than intersecting track. Despite the lack of direct engagement with their findings and methods, scholars in linguistic anthropology and general linguistics will benefit from a close reading of H's ideas.

H seeks to encompass all social theory, and thus all understandings of human life, within a communicative framework that is sensitive to the ways the relationship between individual and society are mediated in uses of language and our evaluative stances towards others. In this goal, he seeks to reconcile a wide diversity of positions in the human sciences, from critical materialist views to structural-functionalist and hermeneutic, meaning-centered ones. In pursuing this goal, H develops very sophisticated understandings of the philosophical underpinnings of various positions in social theory. It is his survey and analysis of rival social theories as they relate to communicative conduct that will perhaps be most useful to current researchers and students coming from more empirical backgrounds.

The book concludes with translations of two additional essays from this period in H's work. They extend and expand the perspectives developed in the Gauss lectures and advance his work on communication toward the mature synthesis he provided in his book length works of the 1980s. [JASON BAIRD JACKSON, *University of Oklahoma*.]

English prepositions explained. By SETH LINDSTROMBERG. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1998. Pp. vi, 309. cloth \$83.00, paper \$29.95.

This book was intended to be a useful resource for teachers, translators, coursebook writers, and English speakers generally, rather than a specialized book for linguists. Lindstromberg believes that many seemingly idiosyncratic English prepositions actually reflect a predictable system of meaning, and uses icons, etymology, definitions, and example sentences to support his claim in an easy to understand manner.

The book's 23 chapters cover more than 70 prepositions. Each chapter begins with an overview or initial remarks. It is then broken into sections examining the prepositions' relationships to place, direction,